



*G*LORY BE.. for dappled things

—Gerard Manley Hopkins

Dappling

Selecting the right type can improve the realism of your models

Few things are as striking as a dappled horse. Horsemen do not always agree about color, but dappling has widespread appeal, and that is reflected in their popularity with model horse artists. But when it comes to dappled models, they do not always accurately reflect the type of dappling specific to their color. Picking out the right dappling for the color of your model can help improve placings, and developing an eye for the details that characterize the different types is an essential skill for assessing realism in finishwork.

DAPPLE GREY. The most familiar form of dappling occurs as part of the greying process. As a grey horse gets lighter, dapples begin to appear on the sides, shoulders and neck. Usually the lower legs are lighter with irregular blotches along the cannon bones. The forearms and stifles may have erratic lines of white hairs, sometimes called spider veins. Although the head of a grey horse is often one of the first things to fade with age, irregular mottling on the forehead is common, especially on horses that are vividly dappled. With each shedding, the dapples become more noticeable and widespread. Eventually the dapples merge and fade until the coat is white, with the hindquarters retaining dapples the longest.

Not all greys develop dapples, however. Some horses turn lighter without going through the dappled phase. Other greys only develop faint dappling in limited areas. The tendency to dapple, and to dapple vividly, runs in families and is more typical in some breeds than in others. This is also true for the rate at which grey horses

lose their dapples. Percherons, for example, have been bred for a slow rate of greying and tend to stay dappled the longest. Dappling caused by greying has one of the widest ranges of expression, both when it comes to the contrast between the dapples and the rest of the coat, and the scale of the dapples themselves.

SILVER DAPPLE. Silver is a gene that dilutes black hair to a mocha or chocolate color. In the United States, the color first came to the attention of Shetland breeders, where black ponies with the silver dilution were originally called “silver dappled chestnut.” The name made sense because the color often looks more silvery, and less golden, than a normal chestnut, yet still looks more like chestnut than black or bay. The dappling was notable because ordinary chestnuts do not usually have intense dappling—and it was the intensity of the dappling that the early Shetland breeders found so appealing.

It is easy to see why the color was popular. Unlike grey horses, silvers do not lose their dapples as they age, and in some individuals the trait is visible quite young.

The amount of dappling



and the level of contrast on an individual horse can vary from season to season, but usually a silver dapple retains some degree of dappling throughout its life.

Silver dapples are different in tone from a dapple grey. They tend to be warmer than a black horse turning grey, and less rosey than a grey that was born bay or chestnut. The location of the dappling is also different, tending to be more concentrated along the belly and up the sides of the horse. While the face is the first place to turn light on many greys, silver dapples often have a dark face mask. This usually includes the forehead and extends to the area around the eyes, and down the nasal bones to the muzzle. Like greys, silvers often have mottled legs that are lightest along the cannon. This is also the one area that will dapple on a bay silver. In all other respects, bay horses with the silver dilution are not any more prone to being dappled than ordinary bays, because the red areas of the coat are not affected.

SOOTY DAPPLE. Another common cause for dappling is sootiness. Sooty horses have black hairs mixed in their coats. This type of dappling is more common on sooty bay or brown horses, but not all sooty horses are dappled. Dappling is quite rare in sooty chestnuts, especially chestnuts in the copper or red shades, though muted sooty dapples are seen on some of the very pale, dusty shades. Oddly enough, sooty palominos—which are genetically chestnut—can show the same dappling that is seen in sooty bays. There seems to be a connection between the cream dilution and dappling, since buckskins are also prone to dramatic sooty dappling and both palominos and buckskins are noted for pronounced seasonal dappling.

Sooty dappling tends to be more concentrated on the upper portions of the body, particularly the neck, shoulders and withers. Like dapple greys, sooty dappling more often looks like a dark overlay on top of the body color, rather than lighter spots coming from

within the coat. Many sooty dapples have a distinctive lighter area from the poll extending down the jugular groove. Sooty palominos with extensive dappling sometimes have mottled cannons much like those seen on dapples greys and silver dapples.

TRANSITIONAL DAPPLES. Horses with the mealy pattern—also known as pangare—are lighter on the belly, chest and lower buttocks. It is not unusual to see dappling in the area where the darker coat transitions to the paler undersides. Transitional dapples in the darker areas are fairly small, closely-spaced and have an irregular starburst shape. The dapples in the lighter areas tend to be larger and more irregular in outline. When a horse inherits both the mealy and the sooty pattern, both types of dappling can be present in the coat at the same time; this combination is relatively common in some draft horse breeds.

CONDITION DAPPLES. Where sooty dapples look like a dark outline over a lighter body color, condition dapples look like a lighter glow that comes up from within a darker body color. Condition dapples often have a reflective quality and are more noticeable in well-lit environments. Because these are subtle, they are among the most difficult dapples to paint convincingly.

Some horsemen insist that all horses will show dapples if kept in good condition. That seems to be more



true for horses that have bright red or golden-red body colors. Dull red colors, as well as some of the diluted colors, seem less inclined to show dappling even when the horse is well-groomed and in excellent health. It may be that certain colors lack the reflective quality necessary to produce condition dappling. However, since there is a clear link to health and grooming, the turnout and condition being portrayed with a sculpture should factor into incorporating this trait into finishwork.

*S*EASONAL DAPPLES. Some horses develop dapples as their coat changes during the spring and fall. This seems to be especially noticeable in palominos and buckskins, which consistently develop seasonal dapples even when they have clear gold bodies without a trace of sootiness. The other group of colors that sometimes develop seasonal dapples are the varnish roan appaloosas and sabino roans. Dapples are not considered a feature of either appaloosas or sabinos, but when they are present they are usually seasonal. Seasonal dapples tend to have a blotchy outline (though typically less angular than transitional dapples) and a fair degree of contrast, but the tone of the coat is more uniform than is seen with sooty dappling, where the “frame” of the dapple is shaded black or charcoal rather than a more intense version of the same color.

*R*EVERSE DAPPLES. Reverse dapples have centers that are darker than the surrounding coat instead of lighter. Like condition dapples, reversed dapples are usually more subtle and have softer contrast than traditional dappling on a grey, silver or sooty horse. They are most commonly found on the barrel and hips, though they can extend over the shoulders and up the neck. Reverse dappling can occur on any color, but is most common on champagnes and dark-headed roans. Horses that have been clipped can also develop small dark areas similar to reverse dapples as their coat returns. A rare and particularly striking form of reversed dappling is sometimes called marbling or “giraffe spotting”. Marbled horses have a network of pale roan outlines on the sides of their body. In more extensively marbled horses, this can include the face, ears, neck and upper legs. Because the areas inside the outlines appear darker, the effect is very similar to reverse dappling on a dark-headed roan, though the dapples themselves are often larger and more irregular in outline.

Careful observation can help artists, collectors and judges develop their eye for the differences between the types of dappling. For a great exercise that will help that process, check out “Sorting Out Horse Colors” on page 33.

Close-up photos of different types of dapples, top to bottom: Seasonal dappling on a palomino; sooty dappling on a palomino; silver dapple (winter coat); dapple grey (born black); transitional dappling on a mealy red bay; condition dappling on a black

